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SUBJECT: ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN GATHERS FORCE

REF: A. KIGALI 78 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. 08 STATE 872 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In recent months, anti-corruption efforts by the Rwandan government (GOR) have gathered force, with several senior civil servants under arrest. The GOR leadership is issuing orchestrated messages on anti-corruption, and a new anti-corruption body has been established to coordinate investigation and prosecution of malefactors. Prosecutors believe they have President Kagame's full backing to follow corruption wherever it leads. The GOR has made "service delivery" a key priority for the next 18 months as it heads for the fall 2010 presidential elections. Honesty in government is an essential component of that policy goal -- a government that delivers on its promises and holds its officials to high standards. Not all senior officials support these high standards, and some ministers and other are reportedly shaken by the rising intensity of the campaign. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Since December 2008, a number of government officials have been arrested or are being sought on corruption-related charges. These include the permanent secretaries (the senior civil servants in each ministry, with broad budgetary authority) of the Ministries of Infrastructure, Education (he reportedly has fled to London) and East African Community, as well as two directors general in the Ministry of Finance and Institute of Statistics. The directors of 12 of Rwanda's 14 prisons are also under investigation, and so is the director general for a genocide survivors fund. A number of employees at the Rwanda Revenue Authority and other government offices have been fired. Several dozen mid-level civil servants in various ministries are also either under arrest or active investigation. Every week, more announcements are made of investigations and arrests.

[1](#)3. (SBU) To strengthen anti-corruption efforts, the GOR announced the formation of an anti-corruption council in late January composed of the Ombudsman office, the Prosecutor General, the Rwanda National Police Commissioner and several ministries. At the same time, the GOR has stepped up its anti-corruption public statements. During the National Dialogue at the end of 2008, when Ombudsman Tito Rutaremara challenged the entire national local leadership assembled at the Parliament building: "I will be watching you" (ref B).

[1](#)4. (SBU) At the National Leadership Retreat (a yearly February convocation of senior executive branch officials) President Kagame pointed to the recent corruption arrests and

stated, "It is not enough to be clean, you should not turn a blind eye and pretend corruption elsewhere does not concern you." Most recently, at the inauguration of the 2009 National Judicial Year, Kagame called upon the nation's judiciary and court officers to desist from corrupt acts, calling corruption a major stumbling block to the establishment of a strong and effective judiciary. He added Rwanda did not need donor aid to address corruption. He issued a strong warning that those officials who do not "change their evil ways" will be subject to "harsh punishment." Other speakers, including the President of the High Court and the Chief Prosecutor, also focused their remarks on battling corruption.

15. (C) Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga (strictly protect) recently discussed with pol/econ counselor the unfolding of the national-level anti-corruption campaign and President Kagame's keen interest and support in rooting out corruption. According to Ngoga, he regularly briefed the President on these ongoing investigations. With this high degree of Presidential support, Ngoga and his prosecutors now act with greater confidence in their investigations. Ngoga noted that the police and prosecution service had been investigating various ministries and offices for over two years, following Auditor General reports on the financial failings of numerous government offices (see 07 Kigali 743). Recent prosecutions were to some extent the fruits of that lengthy labor, he said, but equally useful were the rising number of tips and reports from inside those offices. "People take us more seriously on corruption, and they report more now," he commented. Lack of required financial disclosure by senior civil servants had also been a focus of investigation.

16. (C) Ngoga said his office receives regular "reaction" from what he termed "blocks" of influence within the Rwandan government. He noted that whenever a major arrest is made, certain persons call to tell him how "wonderful" his efforts are, while others call to register their dismay and surprise. Sometimes these unsolicited calls will take on an ugly tinge, alleging a particular arrest was made to balance an arrest from another of Rwanda's two main ethnic communities. Ngoga stated, however, that "these opinions are almost never based on the merits of the case," but rather which "block" is affected, for good or ill. With the President behind him, he ignores these expressions of concern or approval, he commented.

17. (C) Following the government retreat, one minister described for DCM the strong efforts being made to address corruption in the government ranks. At the same time, this minister asserted that not all ministerial-level hands were clean and some colleagues appeared to be shaken by this heavy and intense Presidential and prosecutorial focus on corruption. The corruption includes missing funds for survivor housing tracts, tendering scams on road projects, solicitation of bribes from local businessmen, and accumulations of wealth far beyond the modest salaries of mid-level civil servants.

18. (C) Comment. Rwanda's anti-corruption campaign is not window-dressing. The GOR and ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front pride themselves on their discipline and attention to detail, and important government policies are implemented with a degree of strictness and exactitude that can be breathtaking to behold. Anti-corruption is just such a policy goal, and to date government cadres found wanting are dismissed and prosecuted with little sympathy for the persons involved. Which "block" within the government is up or down is in some ways beside the point -- the GOR has determined that honest behavior is a core value in its very focused efforts to grow the economy and expand opportunity for its people. Opportunistic corruption by local and national officials, anxious to cash in their positions through solicitation of illegal payments, is one worry for government. Another is the effort by some senior officials to foster relationships with large business interests, and extend significant government or RPF ownership in these businesses, open or disguised, for their own benefit. Ngoga, Ombudsman

Rutaremara, and others embarked on this campaign have many allies within the government, including President Kagame. There are also powerful people who oppose their efforts. With the exception of the removal of the head of the Rwandan National Police in summer 2008 (he is still technically "suspended"), no close Presidential associate has been accused of engaging in corrupt practices. End comment.

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